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## Abstract

Nudging Pixels is a design podcast that features interviews with designers and developers from the Finnish technology industry. The podcast is produced and hosted by me and my colleague Elina Korpela for Houston Inc., a software consultancy based out of Helsinki, Finland. In this Master's thesis, I explore the role Nudging Pixels plays in helping Houston Inc. build its network and brand.

The role of this podcast is examined through three lenses, as a tool for knowledge sharing, as content marketing and for building familiarity within the design and technology community in Finland. The results presented in this thesis are based on the findings collected from informal interviews with listeners and critical reflection. These findings are used to iterate every episode of Nudging Pixels continuously.

Nudging Pixels is an ongoing podcast first published in January 2019. This thesis explores the process behind creating the podcast, and how it attempts to meet the goal of providing new and reliable content to its listeners. As a final result, this thesis aims to provide information to practitioners who may wish to embark upon the endeavour of creating a podcast to further their company's reputation.

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**Keywords** podcasting, design podcast, digital content marketing, corporate storytelling

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# **Voices of specialists**

Using a podcast to further  
company reputation

Maya Pillai  
Master's Thesis



# Abstract

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Master of Arts thesis abstract

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# Abstract

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The role of this podcast is examined through three lenses, as a tool for knowledge sharing, as content marketing and for building familiarity within the design and technology community in Finland. The results presented in this thesis are based on the findings collected from informal interviews with listeners and critical reflection. These findings are used to iterate every episode of *Nudging Pixels* continuously.

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## Chapter I

# Introduction

## 1.1 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is composed of two parts. First, the production of the podcast on the topic of design, *Nudging Pixels* (link in Appendix) for the IT consulting company Houston Inc. Second is the written documentation that identifies and addresses my main research goals and learnings. This written text is divided into three sections:

### 1. Introduction, background and methodology

This section covers the research question and objectives of the thesis. I introduce the context of this thesis and provide an overview of the terms and concepts used in the text. It also includes a concise history of the medium of podcasts and content marketing and the context within which I present this research. It also provides an overview of the current landscape of design podcasts in Finland and elaborates on the structure of a successful podcast.

### 2. Production process and documentation

This section introduces the methodology within which this thesis was conducted. It also covers the production process of the podcast, *Nudging Pixels*, which makes up the other half of this thesis.

### 3. Results and conclusion

This section reviews the main findings of the thesis. The research question and goals form the structure for the critical findings. This part also includes strategies for the further development of the production. Essential learnings are documented to make a useful contribution to the field of podcast production as a means of content marketing.

## 1.2 Research question

This thesis explores the question :

What role can a podcast play, as a vehicle of knowledge dissemination, in helping a company build its network and brand?

In an attempt to understand this role, the use of podcasts is examined in the following ways in this thesis:

- As a means to share knowledge
- As a form of content marketing
- As a tool to build familiarity with the audience

## 1.3 Motivation

### 1.3.1 Introduction to Houston Inc.

Houston Inc. Consulting Oy, referred to as Houston Inc. in the rest of this text, is a digital service consultancy based in Helsinki, Finland. Which means that we provide support to businesses to help build software and other digital services based on the business' requirements. Houston Inc. has a total of 90 employees in Helsinki and Turku, of which 55 are developers, and nine are designers. Our clients include Finnish corporations like Finnair (Airline), Konecranes (Crane manufacturing) and Caverion (Building and industrial services) amongst others. Development and design consultants from Houston Inc. work closely with clients to develop the required software and digital services.

Houston Inc. hired their first designer in 2013. They realised that their clients needed software development services that would range from concept design to final development. This need from a few clients prompted Houston Inc., to hire

more designers. So since the year 2017, the design team has increased from three to nine. They wanted to provide a more holistic service to their clients by including design services as part of their consultancy offering. Having more designers would also mean that the development teams from Houston Inc. would have more control over a software's design and development. However, having had designers only for the past few years, design at Houston Inc. is very young and not that well known in the design industry and amongst peers.

### **1.3.2 Problem Definition**

Only a handful of our clients are aware of Houston Inc.'s design offerings. We needed to educate not only our clients but also other designers and potential partners in the Finnish design and technology industry about our skills and design values. This was important because it would provide us with the opportunity to have a broader and more diverse software development portfolio – ones where design can play a critical role. We also wanted to be more involved in the design community in Finland. It is important to clarify here that by using the word design, I am only talking about design in the technology industry. There are various other spheres of design, and since at Houston Inc., we do not provide these other services, the word design in this text should be associated with the design of digital products and software in technology.

We wanted a way to engage with and educate the design community in Finland - designers, developers, clients and potential partners or employees, about us, our offerings and philosophy. Companies use different strategies to market their brand (refer to fig. 1), which include hosting casual networking meetups, educating through blog posts or social media and even hosting conferences. Most of these methods are useful for different reasons -- blog posts can be written and shared quickly and routinely, in-person events ensure physical interaction, and while conferences provide networking and learning opportunities, they are also a high-investment.



## B2B Marketers' Content Marketing Tactic Usage

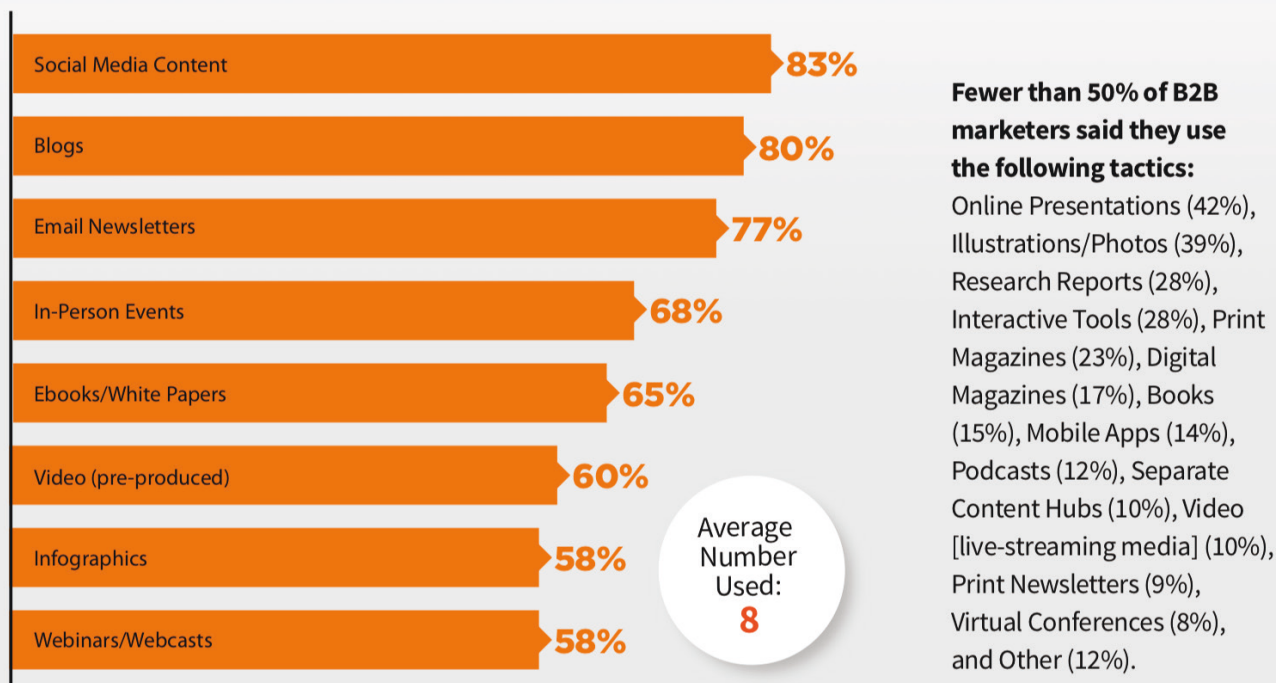


Fig 1. B2B content marketing tactics usage, From "2017 B2B Content Marketing Trends—North America" by Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

### 1.3.3 Why a podcast

To bring more recognition to Houston Inc.'s skills and offerings, we use a mix of mediums - social media, in-person events and case studies. Although social media posts help our followers get to know the day to day experiences of working at Houston, in-person events provide an opportunity to interact face to face with the design and development community and case studies are a useful platform to showcase the work that we do, a design podcast can combine all three of these aspects. Podcasts provide an informal platform for us to not only discuss pertinent topics on design that are relevant to us and the design community but can also help us have conversations with and meet new people in the form of interviews. The effectiveness of the medium has been discussed further in chapter 2, Podcasts in Context. Although conferences and blogs can also provide engagement opportunities, a podcast is more economical than hosting

a conference and like blogs can provide more continued engagement. Podcasts have the added advantage over blogs that they can involve different voices and opinions too. We are avid podcast listeners at Houston Inc. and one of our philosophies is - Always try what you love. My colleague Elina Korpela and I, designers at Houston Inc., wanted to experiment with the medium and explore the opportunities it would bring forth in terms of building a wider network and giving us a platform to talk about our design philosophy. This thesis documents this exploration of using a design podcast and my findings from it.

The long term goal is that Houston Inc. would be associated with the design podcast. But the short term goal is to associate this podcast with conversations around the newest and latest design trends in Finland. The team behind the podcast consists of my colleague Elina Korpela, Senior Designer and myself, a User Experience Designer at Houston Inc. We are both actively involved in the podcast as co-hosts and producers<sup>1</sup>. A more in-depth overview of our process is covered in chapter 4, The making of *Nudging Pixels*.

In the following chapter, I examine the various ways in which podcasts are used to tell stories, share knowledge and help companies build their network and brand.

<sup>1</sup> Responsible for planning and executing the production -- that is recording, editing and publishing

## Chapter 2

# Podcasts in context

This chapter covers the terminology and definitions used in this text. It includes relevant research done in the areas of podcasts and content marketing. It also provides the framework within which this thesis was conducted.

## **2.1 History of podcasts and their evolution**

Podcasting as a medium has become popular, but at the same time, it continues to be a niche (Markman & Sawyer, 2014). It is a medium that has a loyal following and for its followers, the current content is staggeringly large (Markman, 2015). A simple mention of the term is a trigger amongst enthusiasts to list their favourite recommendations.

When the medium was born in 2004, a Google search of the word podcasts yielded around 6000 hits (Chadha, Alex Avila, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012) and 15 years later in March 2019, it receives over one billion hits. This section will provide a brief outline of the history of this medium, its current status and how its gaining popularity keeps it relevant in a world thirsty for content.

### **2.1.1 What is podcasting and how does it work?**

The term podcast has had a few definitions over the years, and according to the Oxford dictionary, it is formed by combining the words iPod and broadcast (Oxford Dictionaries | English, n.d.). "The iPod was the first truly great MP3 player" according to Costello (2019). For the purpose of this thesis, I will be using the definition by ipodder.org which says, "A podcast is a show that is broadcast over the web and is broken up into parts or episodes" (iPodder, n.d.).

Even until recently, it was believed, that to be a podcast listener you needed to have access to an Apple device (Chadha, Alex Avila, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012). But thanks to

internet-enabled phones and a variety of podcast streaming applications more people are listening to them (Chadha, Alex Avila, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012). Apart from iTunes, one of the primary places for podcasts, countless apps are available on the Android, Windows and Apple marketplace that makes listening to podcasts possible. Furthermore, most podcasters also make their content available on websites. So, instead of an Apple device like an iPod or a MacBook computer, all someone needs now to listen to their favourite podcast, is any computer or a smartphone with an internet connection.

What distinguishes the medium from radio, is not just the availability of podcasts on the internet but also, RSS or Really Simple Syndication (Crofts, Fox, Retsema, & Williams, 2005). RSS enables the listener to subscribe to their favourite shows. Therefore, instead of the listener keeping a record of what to find, a new episode is automatically downloaded into their podcast app as long as they have subscribed to the show via RSS. Most smartphone apps have made searching and subscribing easy. The internet makes it possible for audiences to listen to podcasts from anywhere in the world. This allows the medium to garner a large audience and significant radio broadcasters, like the National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States, have started producing podcasts to take advantage of this broader reach.

### 2.1.2 A brief history of podcasting

There are a few people credited with the popularisation of podcasts. A New York Times article from 2004 has highlighted some of the earliest adopters of the medium, "Dawn and Drew of *The Dawn and Drew Show*, Kris and Betsy Smith of *Croncast*, Matt Schichter of *The BackStage Pass*, MadPod and Dan Klass of *The Bitterest Pill*" (Crofts, Fox, Retsema, & Williams, 2005). According to Crofts et al., Dave Winer is known for "inventing the podcast model". He included functionality in RSS that would allow someone to subscribe to a media file. He did so before podcasts were made available on iTunes, on the insistence of former MTV video jockey Adam Curry (Crofts, Fox, Retsema, & Williams, 2005). Following this, programmer and

blogger, Kevin Marks, created a script that would download audio files via RSS and pass them to iTunes to further be able to transfer these audio files into an iPod (Marks, 2003).

Almost a year after RSS was starting to be used to distribute podcasts, in June 2005, Apple released a new update to iTunes 4.9 which included support for podcasts (Crofts, Fox, Retsema, & Williams, 2005). This meant that a separate program was no longer required to download these audio files, which resulted in the medium being more widespread. But this resulted in cease and desist orders that were issued by Apple to many podcast application developers as well as service providers for the usage of the terms iPod or Pod in the names of their products, which made things difficult for independent podcast creators and publishers ('podcast Ready', 2006).

Podcasts enjoyed a small but steady audience for almost 10 years until the show *Serial* was released in October 2014. *Serial* is produced by Ira Glass, a popular figure in podcasting who is known for hosting *This American Life*, a radio show turned podcast, and according to Markman is the reason for *Serial* achieving five million downloads in record time (Markman, 2015). It is touted to have brought a golden age in podcasting (Berry, 2015).

Released in 2010, *99% invisible* had already garnered a loyal audience. The show was created by Roman Mars, a population geneticist who shifted to work in radio and made *99% invisible* in his bedroom ('99% Invisible', n.d.). However *Serial* painted a shift in the podcasting landscape. It had an investigative, journalistic approach that piqued the audience's interests. In The premise was quite original for a podcast, in brief -- it investigated a murder crime through interviews with the accused and families and friends of those involved, a story waiting to be heard (Berry, 2015). *Serial* treated the format of podcasts like a series. Every episode continued into the next, and this was a new format for listeners (Durrani, Gotkin, & Laughlin, 2015). Podcasts like *99% invisible* had and still have stand-alone episodes. Listeners did not know how *Serial* would end, even though in real life the suspect was sentenced and was serving time. The show approached the

theme very empathetically, which is what set it apart from its counterparts. It was good journalism presented in the form of a narrative which "the audience could engage with intellectually and emotionally" (Berry, 2015, p. 4).

Additionally, the popularity of podcasts has also grown because of social media. Hosts have used Facebook, Instagram and especially Twitter to engage more with their audiences. This is different from how radio has functioned, and because podcasts exist on the internet, they have a more varied following in terms of where the listeners live. Podcasts and their hosts use their social media profiles to share updates and links to new episodes, which can be heard in any part of the world (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). This type of sharing and access is not possible through radio.

The rise in the popularity of the medium can also be credited to higher production values. In the early days, it was common to listen to someone interviewing a guest in their basement, but now with major corporations, studios and radio broadcasters getting involved in creating podcasts, (Chadha, Alex Avila, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012) it's a different situation. Production quality has also started to play a major part in the podcasts audiences choose to listen to. Some surveys have even suggested that poor quality of production can be a deterrent when a listener chooses what to listen to (Chadha, Alex Avila, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012). With high production values, multiple genres and strong audience-host connections, it can be difficult to distinguish between radios, podcasts and blogs.

### 2.1.3 Radio, Podcasts and Blogs

There are definite similarities between the three mediums, yet they all have varied audiences and reach. Podcasting is often confused with radio. According to Bottomley (2015, p. 166), "This confusion is hardly surprising considering that many of today's most successful "podcasts" originated as terrestrial radio programs and still air on broadcast radio". Prior to it getting the name, it was called audio blogging by many (Hammersley, 2004). Although, as a medium, it has come into

its own (Berry, 2016). Like radio, topics for podcasts range from narrative readings to journalistic investigations and even discussions akin to editorials in newspapers (Dearman & Galloway, 2005).

Podcasting does not have the same limitations that radio has in terms of geographical reach, and as for blogs, they are consumed quite differently by the audience. Blogs are read and are difficult to do while multitasking, like cooking or taking a walk and while listening to the radio, one needs to be tuned in to the right station on their phone or media player. As for podcasts, one can listen to them through headphones attached to their phones while doing other tasks (Nyre, 2015).

#### 2.1.4 The different podcast formats

As you will infer from this chapter, the medium of podcasts allows its creators to follow any format they choose and also come up with completely new ways of sharing audio content. However, with this section, I attempt to provide a basic understanding of the different types of podcast formats that can be found, accompanied by examples. Links to all of the mentioned shows can be found in the appendix.

**Interviews:** Shows like *Design Matters with Debbie Millman* and *WTF with Marc Maron*, all feature interviews with guests. They may have a short introduction from the host, but the main content is the interview, usually featuring one guest.

**Non-fiction narrative:** Then there are the podcast series like *Serial*, detailed in the previous section, and *S-Town*. These shows feature interviews with various different people but primarily build a narrative that flows from one episode into another, akin to a non-fiction television series.

**Fictional storytelling:** These shows are usually fictional stories, and they follow a similar format to television fiction shows. Examples of such shows are *Welcome to Night Vale* and the recently released *Blackout*, produced by Academy Award winner Rami Malek.



**Hybrid:** Mixed format shows like *99% invisible* and *Note to Self with Manoush Zomorodi* usually feature multiple different interviews, but also have a narrative thread that brings these interviews together, as the hosts take you through the entire topic of the episode. These shows rarely have fictional stories leading the listener from one episode into another, but they may break an episode down into two or more parts to dive deeper into a topic. They follow a similar format as most journalistic articles in newspapers or magazines.

The above categorisation has been based on my listening history and podcasts that I have found. There possibly exist many more formats of podcasts, but with this thesis, I will not dive any deeper into this discussion. As part of this thesis, it is important to understand the difference between interview-based podcasts and hybrid podcasts, since those are the two options we considered for the production of the podcast for Houston Inc. A more detailed explanation regarding this can be found in section 5.1, content and mission statement.

## 2.2 Content marketing that speaks to you

This section covers the history, definition and characteristics of content marketing. It also outlines its association with podcasts and how they can be used as a valid form of content marketing.

### 2.2.1 What is content marketing?

According to the website Content Marketing Institute, "Content marketing is an approach by which companies seek to author and/or share contextually relevant content to create or reinforce their brand messaging. When done effectively, content marketing is not done in direct support of a sales process, but rather by positioning a company or individual

within a space" (2019). Good content should show off one's unique point of view, be relevant to one's customers or target audience and provide value in the form of resources, solving problems or improving customer's lives (Handley & Chapman, 2010).

John F. Oppedahl first used the term content marketing in the year 1996 (Baltes, 2015). However, the history of the term suggests that the original content marketer was the farming equipment company, John Deere when they started a magazine called *The Furrow* in 1895. ('Is John Deere The Original Content Marketer?', 2013) The magazine aimed to give farmers information on how to be better business owners. This example is a textbook case of content marketing. A key learning from the John Deere example that also acts as a goal for this thesis is that, with *The Furrow*, John Deere managed to establish itself as the expert in the industry. They used the unique knowledge they had to claim this status (Pulizzi, 2012).

### 2.2.2 Outsourcing your content

A discussion on podcasts within the context of content marketing would be incomplete without a mention of companies like Gimlet Creative and Pacific Content. On Gimlet Creative's website they state, "Gimlet Creative creates highly produced narrative audio in partnership with brands." (2019). They produce podcasts for Adobe, the software company, Microsoft, Tinder, the dating app, and a few others. Pacific Content has some noteworthy partnership podcasts with McAfee, the computer security company and Mozilla, the technology company. Closer home, in Helsinki, there is Jaksomedia that produces podcasts for Aalto University and for the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland.

It is relevant to mention podcast production companies here, as the recent sale of Gimlet Media, Gimlet Creative's parent company, to Spotify has sparked discussions about the future of the podcasting industry (Quah, 2019). As more companies and brands with big budgets for production and advertising enter the industry, it could signal the end of the amateur, basement podcast (LaForme, 2019).

This thesis will not go into further detail regarding companies that provide podcast production services since the purpose of this thesis is to explore the medium ourselves and document my learnings from it. However, I touch upon the possibilities of such collaborations and their advantages in section 6.3, further development.

### 2.2.3 Content as stories - why podcasts work

According to Leibtag in *The Digital Crown: Winning at Content on the Web*, "content is the information, resources, and materials that you want to communicate to your audience"(Leibtag, 2013). Podcasts are a great way of disseminating information. With audio, one gets their audience's undivided attention. When iTunes released podcast analytics data ('iTunes Connect Resources and Help', 2018), Midroll, the podcast advertising network, found that audiences were listening to about 90% of an episode and very few were skipping ads (Katz, 2018). Also, according to Panoply, the podcast publishing platform, "the few listeners who do skip ads continue to remain engaged with the episode, rather than dropping off at the first sign of an interruption" (Katz, 2018).

Podcasting works perfectly as a form of content marketing because not only is there high engagement, as suggested in the previous paragraph, but it is also literally in a person's voice (Scott, 2009). This helps listeners recognise and create associations between the voice and the content. Moreover, according to (Platt, Truant, & Wright, 2014), "listeners spend hours with your voice in their heads". They can hear the emotion and hence make a better connection.

Storytelling is a key characteristic of podcasts. Sullivan in his essay on the Podcast Movement conference in 2016, notes that Glynn Washington, host of the WNYC radio show and podcast Snap Judgement urged the audience to treat podcasts as the highest form of narrative (2018). He says, "Washington explicitly identified podcasting as an immediate, almost visceral form of narrative, something he noted that public media was sometimes lacking. Here podcasting was linked

explicitly to other forms of narrative creativity: to novels, to poetry, and to music." (Sullivan, 2018).

Based on the above claims, if content can be communicated to an audience in an effective narrative, they will be more likely to have an immersive experience with the podcast. However, this requires the storytelling approach to have a strategy (von Rimscha, 2015). A strategy can make sure that audiences return to your podcast after every episode, or even look forward to it. Your approach needs to be wide enough to have room for expansion, but also relatable enough that "... it's been built around the distinct value your company provides to the specific markets you serve it's primed to scale, shift, and morph without the need to start over." (Albee, 2015, p. 110) It can be concluded that storytelling is "the only way to successfully plant ideas into the minds of others." (Albee, 2015, p. 103)

## **2.3 Building bridges over microphones**

Podcasts can be considered an intimate bridging medium, a means of communication that generates closeness (Llinares, Fox, & Berry, 2018). Even though the podcast's participants and listeners are not physically proximate, a podcast acts "as a highly portable medium that bridges temporal and spatial divides between social groups in a way that can strongly generate a feeling of intimacy between the podcast participant(s) and the listener" (Swiatek, 2018, p. 174).

In the essay "The podcast as an intimate bridging medium" Swiatek presents his reasons for podcasts being more intimate than the other mediums (2018). Although it is true that the intimate nature of podcasts does come from the informal conversations that podcast participants have with each other, as well as with the listeners, however, this is not very different from say a television talk show. Moreover, with podcasts, the visuals are stripped away. And according to Rivers' research on listening processes, "listening involves

active cognitive processing – the construction of a message from phonic material" (1983, p. 8). She also suggests that a key characteristic of listening is that it creates mental messages that are stored by listeners (Rivers, 1983). It can be concluded that owing to these reasons, mediums such as television, books or video games, can not provide the same level of closeness, directness or memorability even though they also provide knowledge and bridge space and time.

According to Platt, Truant, & Wright (2016) podcasts hosts say, "we meet people all the time who say they feel like they know us and hence feel bonded. That's a hell of a thing in terms of building community around you" (Podcasts chapter, para 6). This characteristic of establishing intimacy, helps audiences build a close relationship with podcast hosts, who they might spend hours listening to. Of course, encounters like the ones mentioned by Platt, Truant, & Wright (2016) depend largely on the reach of the podcast.

With podcasts, one can have a direct conversation with one's audience. One way of doing this is to supply them with an e-mail address or Twitter handle where audiences can leave feedback or questions. Some successful podcasts like *Note to Self* by WNYC studios and *Code Switch* by NPR (see appendix), even ask their audiences to send voice notes, which they then play as part of their future episodes. This strategy mimics how radio hosts asked their audience to call in and ask questions or leave messages. In the same way, podcast hosts use their future episodes as a way of responding to any questions or suggestions their listeners might have (Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

It is challenging for unknown and independent podcasters to gain broad listenership (Anderson, 2008). They must rely on their personal and professional networks to achieve this. Moreover, the success of a podcast does not need to be judged by its vast audience since many podcasts do have niche audiences (Markman & Sawyer, 2014), this can be a significant barrier when it comes to 'bridging' people and forming networks. However, if you create a podcast that includes interviews, it can be one way for the audience to get to know interesting people in the industry and for the creators

to have an opportunity to strike a relationship with their guests.

## 2.4 An overview of related podcasts

This section will provide a brief overview of the current landscape of design podcasts in Finland and outline the need for a podcast like *Nudging Pixels*. It includes a brief analysis of a popular design podcast that also served as a benchmark. It will also cover learnings from the analysis and discuss how they were implemented during the production of *Nudging Pixels*.

### 2.4.1 Design podcasts by Finnish companies

Before diving head-on into the production of *Nudging Pixels*, we needed to find out if similar podcasts existed. Our research showed that there were not too many podcasts in English.

Table 1 shows a list of companies that have or have at some point produced a design or technology related podcast. This list is in no way definite. The results of the table have been collected in the following ways :

- Searching the term 'design' in the podcasts section on the iTunes Store
- Searching in the list of 'relevant podcasts' on the iTunes store
- An online search of our competitors with the term 'podcast'

The companies in this list are all competitors of Houston Inc. in terms of the services they provide to their clients. All companies work in the areas of technology and design.

As is evident from the table, barring Fjord's *Fika*, all other podcasts are in Finnish. However, the reason that *Fika* is in English is that Fjord is an international company with offices worldwide. All other companies produce podcasts in Finnish. There could be multiple reasons for this, but the main one

## List of Finnish design podcasts

Podcast Name	Company	Activity status	Language
Palmun Alla	Solita	2018 - 2019	Finnish
Haastajat	Hellon	2018 - 2019	Finnish
Futureproof	Workday Designers	2018 - 2019	Finnish
Valoisa Tulevaisuus	Futurice	2018	Finnish
Fjord Fika	Fjord	2016 - 2018	English
Vaiheessa	Nordkapp	2016 - 2017	Finnish

Table 1

being that native Finnish speakers host all of the other podcasts and the labour force in Finland mostly comprises of those who speak fluent Finnish. However, the industry is changing with more and more international students coming in to study and subsequently joining the workforce (Busk, Jauhiainen, Kekäläinen, Nivalainen, & Tähtinen, 2016). Companies like Houston Inc., are also trying hard to work with clients outside of Finland. This means they are more open to hiring non-Finnish speakers.

By making a design podcast in English, there was a gap that we could fill. One of the primary reasons we wanted to make the podcast in English was because I do not speak Finnish well enough. Another was that we felt there already were quite a few podcasts in Finnish available. Furthermore, as an avid listener of podcasts, I found the lack of English podcasts unsettling. The number of international workers in the Finnish labour force is ever increasing, and this left non-Finnish speakers out of the loop (Busk, Jauhiainen, Kekäläinen, Nivalainen, & Tähtinen, 2016). However, this meant that any guests that were part of the podcast would have to be fluent in English. This did not pose a problem for us, as during our research for potential guests, we found that all of them had written or given talks in English at some point in their career.

The basic format of all of the listed podcasts is

interview-based, that is, each episode features an interview with one person or a couple. We decided that as a starting point we would do the same. It would give us an opportunity to meet and engage with people from the industry whom we wished to network with. There are a lot of exciting designers and technologists whom we wanted to talk to. Eventually, we did not stick to this format very strictly and it changed it as we produced more episodes. The reasons for these have been elaborated on in Chapter 5, the Making of *Nudging Pixels*.

### 2.4.2 Analysing the structure of a popular design podcast

99% *invisible* is a popular podcast on design, part of the podcast collective, Radiotopia. In this text, I will be using the short version of the show's name, 99pi. It is a podcast I listen to regularly and enjoy very much. The show acts as a benchmark for our production of the design podcast for Houston Inc. It features multiple interviews that are tied together with an effective narrative. There are three layers to the show, the interview with the guests, the host Roman and the reporter's conversation based around the interview, and you, the listener. The production value of the show and the connection its host Roman Mars makes with his voice in my ear, are some of the reasons why I wish to analyse an episode. Breaking down a show into its various elements and understanding how they present their content is a useful way of picking up tips and tricks that can be applied in one's own show.

The episode deconstructed in this section is number 328, titled *Devolutionary Design*. The episode is 32 minutes long. The first part is about Devo's, an American rock band from the 70s, iconic cover art with the picture of Chi Chi, a famous golfer. The second part dives into an older story recorded in 2010 (episode 328 published in 2018). It is also an excerpt from another show that Roman Mars was once a part of and the reporter is Katie Mingle, who once a reporter on *re:sound*, now works at 99pi. All of this information is not assumed; Roman explains the context and introduces the reporters to



us. This is a technique used by many shows to not only uplift other shows they enjoy but also to bring in some more exciting content into their shows.

I will not do an analysis of the second half of the show as it is not a 99pi production and hence has slight variations. In this section, I will elaborate on the key learnings from analysing part one of episode 328 from 99pi.

***a. Holding the listener's attention by variations in voice and using them to build a narrative***

99pi has a few reporters on the show. Roman is the host and the voice that connects it all. However, almost every episode has a different reporter from their team investigating the story where they introduce the beef of the topic and record interviews with guests. At 1:05 minutes into the show we are told by Roman who the reporter for this episode is, Sean Cole, and his interest in the topic. As soon as Roman mentions his name, Sean jumps in with a question. It is like a journalistic piece of writing that is being read out loud. The question and answer round that follows between Roman and Sean is not what you would expect. Roman being the host is the one answering the questions, which gives us a clue about who is running the story here, Sean. There is a lot of back and forth between two different voices, only broken by a sentence or two from Sean informing the listeners of who these people are. We do not know if they were recorded separately or together, but it does not matter. The difference in voices keeps the magic of storytelling alive and the listener's attention on the show.

As one listens to the guests talk about the story of the cover art of the Devo album, you can also hear Roman and Sean's comments. It is like listening in on a conversation between two album cover art enthusiasts.

***b. Building bridges - Connecting your experiences with your audience's***

With almost every episode Roman starts with an introduction that also personally connects him to the topic of the episode.

Roman Mars: It's hard to overstate just how important

record album art was to music before we downloaded everything. Our experience with a record or CD used to be visual. The design of the record cover was your first impression of what was to come. I would stare at the fonts on the cover and pour over the liner notes the first time I put a record on; it was a ritual.

This dialogue conjures up a picture of Roman and his relationship with album covers, which is a great way to build a connection with an audience that probably did the same thing as him. Throughout this introduction, there is a background soundtrack playing. The introduction seems a little scripted but is still full of emotion and descriptive words. It sounds almost like a book reading.

***c. Using questions and answers that elicit a reaction from yourself and by extension your audience***

Another interesting tactic Sean implements while talking to Roman is that he makes a comment and Jerry, one of the guests, who is nowhere in the room with Sean and Roman, finishes his sentence.

Sean Cole: So the band brings that image to the Warner Brothers art department...

Jerry Casale: On an idea that why couldn't we just mutate Chi chi's face? (laughs) So that it isn't Chi Chi anymore?

This back and forth between voices is a crucial characteristic of the production and writing involved in a show like *99pi*. It does not just take one interview and edit that into an episode. There are multiple different conversations all coming together to form one narrative.

Also, parts where Roman and Sean both laugh at certain things that happen in Sean's interviews, are all left in to make the story more impactful. They are funny sections in the episode and listening to your hosts laugh makes you feel like you are laughing with them.

***d. Using descriptive words and voice modulation to help your audience visualise the content***

Every 99pi show ends with Roman reading the credits. Also, as he finishes reading that, he says in a soulful voice full of feeling, "...in beautiful [pause] downtown [pause] Oakland, California". This simple statement paints a picture in the listener's head of where they might be sitting and what Roman might be looking at from his window.

I will be referencing these learnings and how we applied them in our production in chapter 4, The making of *Nudging Pixels*.



## Chapter 3

# Methodological approach

The methodological approach used in this thesis is practice-based research. According to Candy (2006, p. 1), "practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly utilising practice and the outcomes of that practice". This is true for my thesis where "the creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge" (Candy, 2006, p. 3). The creative artefact, in this case, is the podcast produced for Houston Inc.

The practice-based research done in this thesis follows an iterative development process, to meet the goal of interesting, shareable and engaging content that can help Houston Inc. build its brand and network as mentioned in the introductory chapter of this text. According to Candy (2006, p. 18), "Experimental research involves testing hypotheses by manipulating variables within a controlled situation." The controlled situation, in this case, is the recording studio and the tools for recording and editing. The hypotheses are based on personal reflection and informal feedback collected from listeners. Also, the variables manipulated are the script and structure of each podcast episode. Every subsequent episode is iterated based on informal feedback collected from the consumers, in this case, listeners, of the production and through personal reflection, the feedback received from listeners helps make the podcast more engaging and thus a more compelling medium. Due to the iterative nature of the creative artefact, or production, this thesis can also be classified under the category of experimental research.

The aim of the informal feedback collection was not for statistical efficacy, but to gain new insights and ways of doing for myself and any other practitioners reading this document. It also aims to check for any issues or achievements regarding the content and listener experience. Through this informal feedback and reflection, I firstly wanted to identify opportunities and troublesome areas in the production like sections that are of little interest to the audience and content that might expand listener experience. Secondly, I also wanted to understand how and to what effect the goals, outlined in the Introduction chapter, are met.

The informal feedback collected, was from in-depth conversations with friends and colleagues who are part of the target audience, which has been defined in the next chapter. Podcasts are a challenging medium for collecting feedback from all listeners since listener data is minimal. Creators do not have access to listener contact information which makes directly targeting random or anonymous active listeners, difficult.

According to Creswell & Clark 2011, a methodology must be designed "that matches the problem and research questions" (p. 61). In-depth informal conversations with known listeners seemed to be an adequate format for evaluation, given that a qualitative understanding of the listener's experience would provide the best suggestions for ways forward and also because the audience of the project is a tiny niche - digital designers, people with interest in digital design and those who might hire such designers.

Another form of analysis that was adopted in this study, as mentioned previously, is that of reflective practice. Schön defines reflective practice as "the practice by which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience". In the development of this production, my understanding of what makes a good podcast is continuously examined and has helped me find opportunities for betterment.

In conclusion, this text contains resources on the current academic research surrounding podcasts, their production and distribution, content marketing, practical information on how to produce a podcast and analysis on the structure of podcasts. It also includes critical reflection on the practice of podcast production for knowledge sharing and as a tool to further company reputation.





## Chapter 4

# The making of Nudging Pixels

This chapter documents the production process of the design podcast *Nudging Pixels*. The three sections have been divided to cover all the aspects of the production process. Section 5.1 discusses the conceptualisation or pre-production phase, where I talk about how we got started with *Nudging Pixels*. Section 5.2 includes our working methods, the various tools and software that we used, and it also provides an illustrated workflow for the making of an episode of *Nudging Pixels*. In the final section of this chapter, 5.3, you will read about the content management platform that we used and also the tactics we used to promote *Nudging Pixels*. To provide a brief overview, fig 2. shows the timeline for the production of *Nudging Pixels*.

## 4.I Content and mission statement

*Nudging Pixels* was born out of a need to create a voice for design at Houston Inc. The reasons behind why we chose a podcast as our medium to do so, have been elaborated on in section 1.3, Motivation. To get closer to this goal, we needed to figure out the right format, guests and design a production process that we could follow.

### 4.I.I Creating a project blueprint

I was introduced to the NPR Project Blueprint (see Appendix) in a Creative Live online masterclass titled *Blueprint for a standout podcast* by Julie Shapiro (2018.). Elina and I used the blueprint as a starting point to begin working on the podcast. The project blueprint is designed for storytelling projects and not necessarily podcasts. The project blueprint is to be filled out at "...the beginning of the planning process when you have some idea about what you want to do." ('A blueprint for planning storytelling projects', 2018).

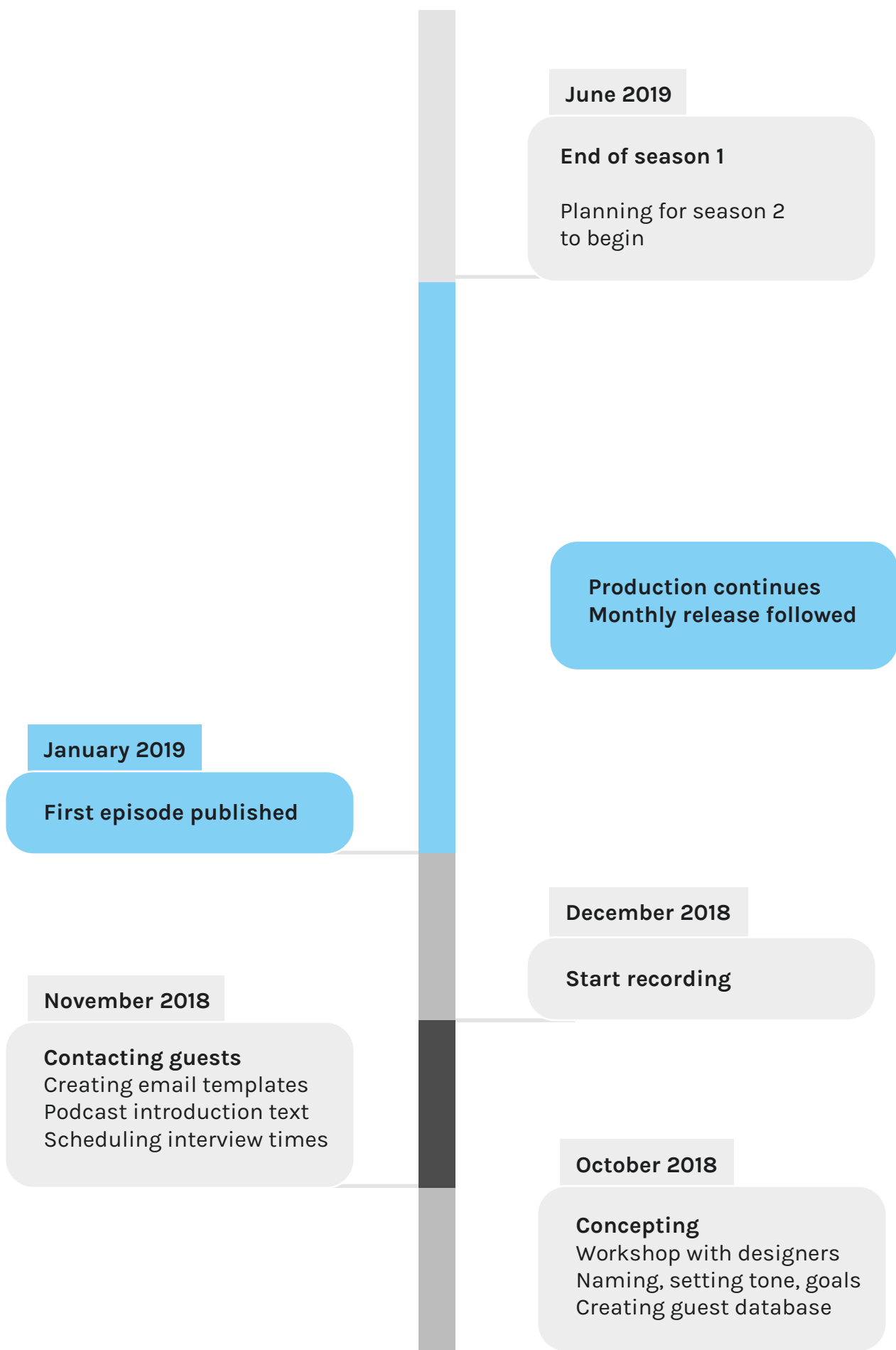


Fig. 2 Illustrated timeline for the production of Nudging Pixels

## Conclusions from using the NPR Project Blueprint

Mission statement	A design podcast that brings different companies, people and point-of-views together to discuss the current ways of doing design and future design trends.
Target audience	Designers and developers in Finland, potential partners of Houston Inc, potential clients, companies who would need design and development services
Format	Interview or Hybrid

Table 2

With the blueprint, we were able to arrive at a mission statement, target audience and possible formats, as shown in Table 2. However, we also needed to have an understanding of the image we would be representing through the podcast. The podcast needs to show the design philosophy and skills of Houston Inc. This required us to have a short workshop with the other designers at Houston inc.

Our findings from the workshop suggested that the podcast have a casual but fun feel to it. The consensus was not to make it too serious. The workshop also provided an initial list of themes and potential guests. The most important takeaway from the workshop was a name for the podcast, which after voting on a few different suggestions, was decided as *Nudging Pixels*.

### 4.1.2 Finding the right format

Understanding what the right format and length for the podcast should be was the first thing to figure out. Based on our blueprint and initial motivations, we knew that we wanted it to be an interview-based podcast. Such a format would provide us with the opportunity to have in-depth conversations with designers and technologists in the industry whom we wanted to network with.

There are various types of interview-based episodes. There is the long candid conversation like Debbie Millman has with her hosts on *Design Matters with Debbie Millman* and more hybrid shows, see section 2.1.4 for different podcast format definitions, like *99% invisible*. The format of *Design Matters with Debbie Millman* involves an opening advertisement by their sponsors Adobe, and then a short introduction by the host Debbie Millman after which we dive right into the conversation she has with her guests. These episodes are intimate and showcase the relationship that Debbie shares with her guests. The conversations range from what the guests' desks look like, to how they got into their professional field and can sometimes even be about some very personal subjects. In an episode that features an interview from poet Sarah Kay, Debbie asks her about the little poems Sarah's parents used to leave for her in her lunch box ('Debbie Millman | Design Matters', n.d.). When listening to the show, it sounds as though Debbie shares a very close relationship with her guests and questions like these strengthen these notions.

*Design Matters* is an award-winning and one of the longest running design podcasts on iTunes. ('Debbie Millman | Design Matters', n.d.) Despite these rave reviews, my relationship with the podcast has been very sporadic, and the reasons for this were one, the episode length, it is difficult for me to stay engaged with an hour-long episode, and two that not all guests were familiar to me, in terms of their key areas. Other shows like *99pi* that also served as benchmarks are *Note to Self with Manoush Zomorodi* and *Function with Anil Dash*. Both of these shows have a heavy technology focus and are not necessarily only about design. Nevertheless, since design and technology are so intrinsically connected now, they delve into the world of digital design very frequently. Apart from the subjects of the episodes, the hosts manage to create an intimate relationship with their audience. Also, as stated in section 2.3, this could be considered a key reason for my strong preference towards the shows.

The common thread between all three shows is that they are hybrid shows, a combination of interviews and non-fiction narrative, like audio versions of magazine articles. Since they

are our benchmarks, we have to ensure that each episode on our show has a theme. The medium of podcasts allows for experimentation, and we have the freedom and opportunity to modify the format of each episode as we produce them.

Since this is an exploration, we decided early on that our podcast would change and evolve based on the feedback we receive from our listeners. As one listens to each episode in chronological order, you will find that we kept subtly modifying each episode. We learnt from technical mistakes with audio editing and made content modifications like dialogue restructuring. As of now, no two episodes are the same, and that was intentional.

The decision about the length of the podcast was not scientific. Based on our listening preferences and benchmark podcasts, we arrived at an average of an episode length of 25 -35 minutes. Edison Research's 2018 "Podcast consumer report", suggests that 48% of listener's in the United States, listen to podcasts at home and 26 % listen to them in a car or public transportation. If we could apply the same findings to listener behaviour in Finland, then our decision would hold weight. Since, an estimate of average commute time in the Helsinki Capital area states that if people use public transport, then their average travel time would be 34 minutes ("Tilastokeskus - Pääkaupunkiseudulla työmatka taittuu julkisilla puoleessa tunnissa" 2015).

However, since podcasting listening data of Finland is not available, we cannot count this as a significant ruling factor behind the episode length decision. Our initial decision of listening preferences and benchmark podcasts will remain the primary motivation. A survey of *Nudging Pixels* listeners in the future can help with this choice but is something that we might do at the end of the first season. I elaborate on this in section 6.3, Further developments.

We aim to have industry professionals with areas of expertise and use their knowledge to build a show that would give the listeners something useful. We want *Nudging Pixels* to be the place other designers and technology professionals could

count on for relevant and engaging content.

### 4.1.3 Reaching out to potential guests & episode topics

Figuring out who would be the best guests to have on our show was less complicated than anticipated. The workshop with the designers at Houston Inc. gave us an understanding of whom they would like to listen to. Elina and I also had our list of guest preferences based on what we had read and heard during industry meetups and on social media. For example, Elina had read a lot about Kuudes, a strategy and insights studio based in Helsinki, and wanted to interview an insight specialist with whom we could talk about the various ways in which insights have proved useful and what product companies can gain from them. To operationalise design at Houston Inc., I had attended a workshop on DesignOps, short for design operations, and met Angelos Arnis and Sonja Krogius, who feature in the fourth episode of *Nudging Pixels* to discuss the idea behind DesignOps and why companies should be investing in making their design teams work better together.

We started with a long list of potential guest names (see fig. 3) and what we would like to talk to them about. We knew we did not want the episodes to be about our guests' work and journey. It was essential to have a theme around which the conversation would run.

After creating the long list, we first contacted guests with whom we had connections through our personal networks. In some cases, we also sent out cold emails to guests. This required us to write a short description of what our podcast would be about and why we wanted to talk to our guests. An example of such an email can be found in the appendix.

As it so happened, people were keen to talk about their work and themselves. Our first season, six episodes long, includes all of the guests we reached out to.

Deciding episode topics was challenging. For our initial guests, we suggested themes to them that they then prepared to talk about. These themes were based around the guest's expertise. For example, our first guest Akseli Anttila is the Principal UX Designer at Varjo Technologies, the company behind a human eye resolution Virtual Reality headset. We were curious to find out more about what it was like to design for virtual reality and focused on that as the episode's theme.

After the first two interviews, we decided to have pre-interview conversations with our guests where we discussed the topics they would be interested in and chalked out rough areas and episode structures with them (refer to Appendix), which was an improvement, because our guests were a lot better prepared, and we were able to have more succinct conversations. As opposed to our first two guests, where since we did not have the opportunity to brief them, the actual recordings were long and winding. This took up much time in the editing room where we had to cut the conversation down into a cohesive 30 minutes of listening.

Akseli Anttila		Varjo
Elias Pettilä		Wolt
Sonja		Nordkapp
Angelos Arnis		Elisa
Leena Fredriksson		Kuudes
Hannu Oksa, Reaktor		
Mikko Vierumäki, Norr Design		Norr Design
Ville Kaisla, Taiste		Taiste
Finnair UX lead? Mikko Kiviniemi, Design Director (Finnair)		Finnair
Lasse Linna		Houston Inc.
Demos, Gofore, Sofigate, Migri		
Jonna Rantanen, Lina Hayek, Leyla Nasib		Elisa, etc.
Jouni Linkola		Elisa Oyj
Saara Lehmuskoski		
Saara Järvinen		
Annu-Maaria Nivala		

Fig. 3 Screenshot of Google sheet with potential guest names and contact details



## 4.2 Production

### Roles and responsibilities

Concept Team	Elina Korpela		Senior Designer, Houston Inc.
	Maya Pillai		User Experience Designer, Houston Inc.
	Juha Matero, Pekka Pessi, Pyry Nousiainen, Ville Heikkila, Tanja Salmelainen	Workshop participants	Senior Designers, Houston Inc.
Production Team	Elina Korpela	Co-host and co-producer	
	Maya Pillai	Co-host and co-producer	
	Niko Salminen	Theme track	Principal Technologist, Houston Inc.
	Illusia Sarvas	Graphic Design and Social Media	Senior Graphic Designer, Houston Inc.

Table 3

### 4.2.1 The team and working methods

A successful production needs to have people in charge of guest contacting, writing content, interviewing the guests, audio editing and music composition and graphic design for the album and social media artwork. Our team for the podcast was small. Since we did not have much dedicated time for this project, we had to find time between our client work to make it happen. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, there was considerable support in the conception phase from the other designers at Houston Inc.

However, the production work for the podcast was done solely by Elina Korpela and me. We divided the responsibilities of contacting the guests, recording, transcribing and audio editing equally amongst us. We did not set any clear rules for this, but the division of work happened organically. If Elina did the rough cut for one episode, then I would do the final edit on it and start with the rough cut on the next episode. We took turns working with the tools and software since we were both interested in the technical part of the production as well. I took more responsibility with the writing of episode descriptions and the scripted content of each episode since writing that content in English came more naturally to me. Elina focused on creating some sound effects and music that Niko could not provide for us.

For the theme soundtrack of the show, our brief to Niko was simple. We wanted something catchy with a strong bassline. These were purely personal preferences. I felt that starting the episode with a nice beat would work as a right hook for the listeners and reel them into the episode. We shared the music from our benchmark podcasts with Niko who then created a few samples for us from which we picked the one we liked most. We placed the intro theme in a sample introduction clip, and Niko tweaked the music so the beats would sync better with the speech.

We worked similarly with Illusia to create the logo (see fig. 4) for the show and episode artworks. Our brief to her was that we wanted a simple and recognisable logo. We showed her a few existing podcast logos that we liked and shared the album art requirements and guidelines set by iTunes ('Requirements - Podcasts Connect Help', n.d.).

iTunes does not support per episode artwork; however, some other platforms like Overcast and Stitcher did support this functionality and we needed something for promotion on social media channels. So we asked Illusia to create a simple template in which we could very quickly add our guests' profile photos (see fig. 4). This also heavily relied on the *Nudging Pixels* logo. We asked our guests to submit their photos to us as part of the theme discussion Google form we shared with them (see appendix).



Fig 4. Cover artwork and logo for Nudging Pixels designed by Illusia Sarvas



Fig. 4 Episode artwork from the first three episodes of Nudging Pixels from L-R, Akseli Anttila, Elias Aalto, Petra Väänänen-Leimu.

#### 4.2.2 Tools and software

To produce the podcast we needed microphones and a quiet room to record our interviews with guests. Houston Inc. already had recording equipment owing to the production of one video series hosted by our CEO Tomi Ruotimo and another in-house podcast by some of the developers. We used a Zoom H6 as the primary recording device and Sennheiser lav





Fig. 5 Recording Equipment : Zoon H6 and Sennheiser lav microphones



Fig. 6 A meeting room at Houston Inc. that doubled as the recording studio

microphones that can be attached to the speaker's collar (see fig. 5). The microphones were connected to the Zoom H6 so that the recording levels would not differ. This setup was able to provide us with sufficiently high-quality audio.

We had access to a small meeting room which we lined with plants and cushions to make our studio space (see fig. 6). We wanted the guests to talk freely in a relaxed atmosphere. Our guests are not seasoned public speakers, and it was necessary to make them feel like this was just an informal conversation so they could forget about the microphones attached to their collars and speak freely.

There are various audio editing software available such as Audacity and Garageband. Nevertheless, we decided to use Adobe Audition (see appendix for links to software). This was a natural choice since we already had licenses to access all of Adobe's software for our design consulting work. Adobe Audition (see fig. 7) at first seemed like a complicated software, but it has a template for podcast editing and was quick to learn. It only took us the editing of one episode to figure out a smooth workflow on the software.

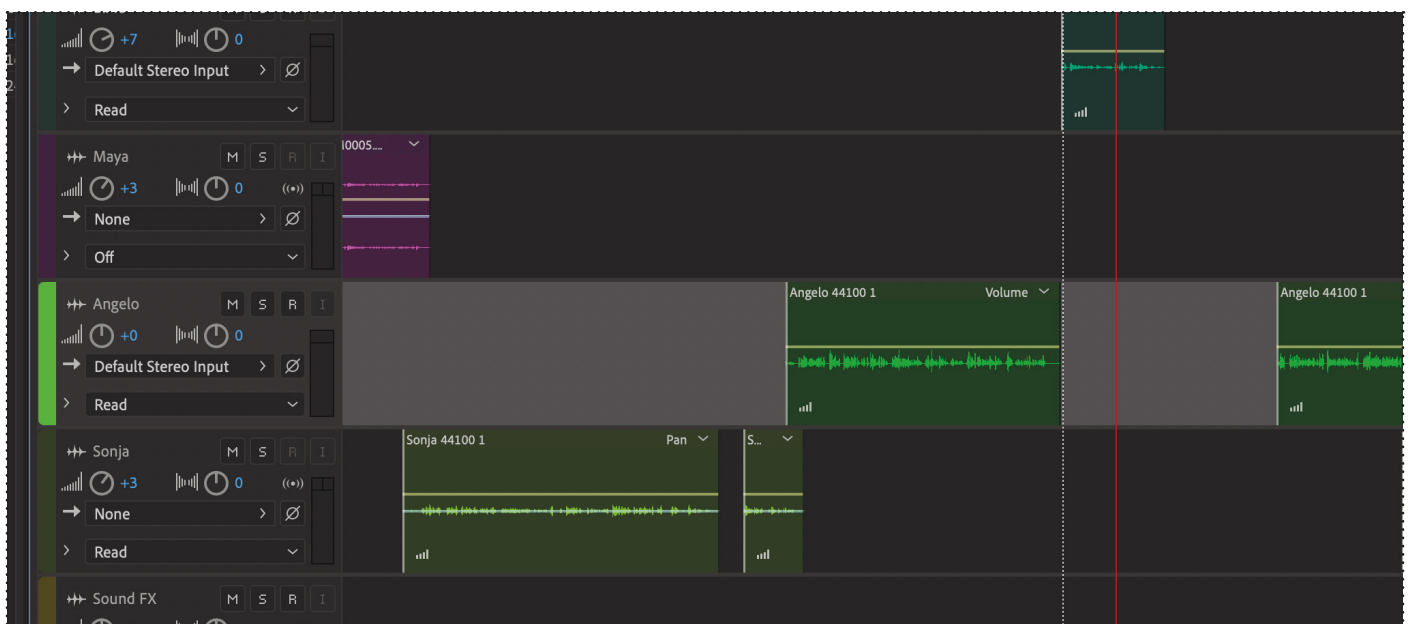


Fig. 7 Screenshot of episode three editing in process using Adobe Audition

### 4.2.3 Production Workflow

The production of each episode followed the same process. Fig. 8 (see p. 48) provides an illustrated guide to the entire workflow. The pre-production phase consisted of guest contacting, scheduling and research on the guests and selected themes. The production phase includes the steps from recording to audio editing. A more detailed understanding of the post-production phase, which includes publishing the episode and social media promotion, will be covered in the next section.

## 4.3 Post-production and Launch

This section discusses some of the content management platforms available and our decision to choose one of them. It also includes the approach we used for promoting *Nudging Pixels* via social media.

### 4.3.1 Comparing different content management platforms

Choosing the right content management platform required some work. Popular listening platforms like iTunes and Spotify do not host podcasts. A podcast needs to be hosted by a service which can provide an RSS link which can then be sent to streaming services like iTunes, Spotify, and Google Podcasts, as explained in section 2.2.1. There are a lot of different options for podcast hosting available like Podbean, Libsyn and Soundcloud to name a few. Most of these platforms are paid services, and since *Nudging Pixels* is an experiment, as of now, we do not have a dedicated budget for it, except for the hours that we put into its production.

During a web search of free platforms, I chanced upon Anchor. fm. (see appendix) Anchor.fm (or Anchor) has an online

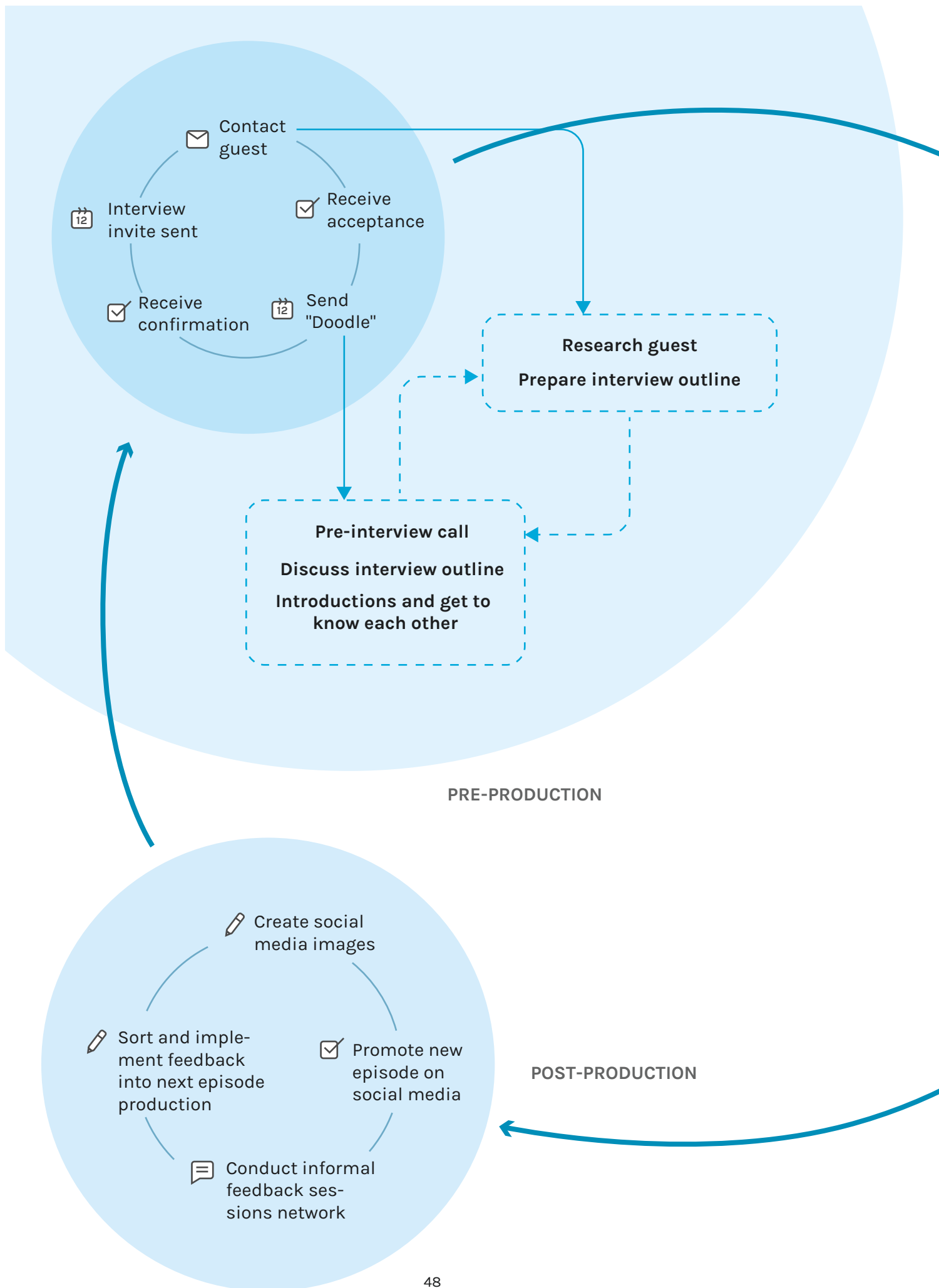


episode editor and a mobile and web app that allows you to record, edit and publish your episode. It is a popular choice amongst novice podcasters who are not sure how long their show would last and wanted to try it out without making a monetary commitment.

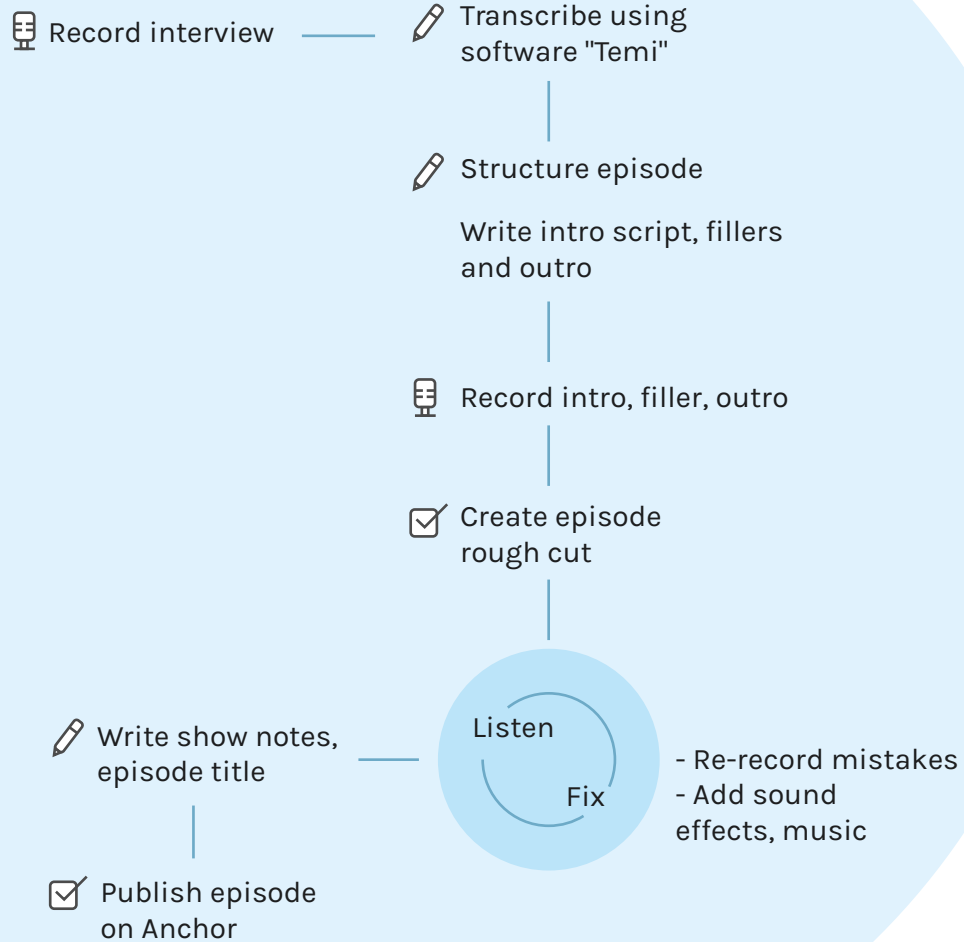
At first glance, Anchor might seem a bit too good to be true. It did have its fair share of controversy regarding a point in their Terms and Conditions that suggested Anchor "owned" your podcast ('Anchor Controversy', 2018). They have since modified their terms and conditions to say that they in no way own the content of your podcast. According to some research, Anchor is also the second most popular platform for hosting podcasts, but also has the second highest rate of inactive podcasts ('What New Data Suggests about Podcast-Hosting Customers', 2018). This is of course because no money is involved and novices and one-time podcasters can easily abandon their podcasting efforts. According to the same study, Soundcloud comes out as the top hosting service, but it provides shockingly little podcast support like automatically pushing your RSS feed to podcast streaming apps and has a limited free plan ('What New Data Suggests about Podcast-Hosting Customers', 2018).

Anchor aims to be a one-stop shop for podcasting. It provides hosting, has editing capabilities and even provides a podcast website. Because it is free and VC funded many professional podcasters have felt threatened with its existence ('Why Anchor Isn't the Villain in the Podcasting Story', 2018). However, it remains to be seen what the future of the hosting platform will be now that it has been bought by Spotify, the music streaming application (Isaac & Sisario, 2019).

Although we do not use Anchor's editing platform because it does not provide enough editing control, we do use it to host *Nudging Pixels*, and my experience with it so far has been satisfying. With Anchor, it is easy to push the podcast out to all of the popular listening platforms like iTunes, Google podcasts, Stitcher and Spotify among others with one click (see fig. 9). Furthermore, Anchor notifies you every time your show is accepted on a new platform. Uploading new episodes







## PRODUCTION

Fig. 8 Production workflow for each episode

is just as quick, and from our experience, the listening platforms picked up the new episodes from immediately to within 20 minutes.

Anchor also provides some data on how people listen to our show. We can see the number of listens in different timelines and what platforms our listeners are coming from (Anchor,

## Where your podcast can be heard ▼

Your podcast is available now on the following platforms. We'll let you know as it becomes available in more places!

If you've manually distributed your podcast to additional platforms, [click here](#) to paste in the links yourself.

### ⚙️ Podcast listening platforms

Anchor	<a href="https://anchor.fm/nudgingpixels">https://anchor.fm/nudgingpixels</a>
Apple Podcasts	<a href="https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/nudging-pixels/id1449180059">https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/nudging-pixels/id1449180059</a>
Google Podcasts	<a href="https://www.google.com/podcasts?feed=aHROcHM6Ly9hbmNob3R0eSBkaWQ6MTUyOTYxMjA0OjE0LmF1dG8ucmVudGluZy5kb291LnRlcmlz">https://www.google.com/podcasts?feed=aHROcHM6Ly9hbmNob3R0eSBkaWQ6MTUyOTYxMjA0OjE0LmF1dG8ucmVudGluZy5kb291LnRlcmlz</a>
Spotify	<a href="https://open.spotify.com/show/5EYgxEZOKaYeCN2tKsDHvO">https://open.spotify.com/show/5EYgxEZOKaYeCN2tKsDHvO</a>
Breaker	<a href="https://www.breaker.audio/nudging-pixels">https://www.breaker.audio/nudging-pixels</a>
Overcast	<a href="https://overcast.fm/itunes1449180059/nudging-pixels">https://overcast.fm/itunes1449180059/nudging-pixels</a>
Pocket Casts	<a href="https://pca.st/4ydd">https://pca.st/4ydd</a>
PodBean	<a href="https://www.podbean.com/podcast-detail/jxsuu-87146/Nudging-Pixels-%E2%80%90-Nudging-Pixels">https://www.podbean.com/podcast-detail/jxsuu-87146/Nudging-Pixels-%E2%80%90-Nudging-Pixels</a>
RadioPublic	<a href="https://radiopublic.com/nudging-pixels-6pwlyD">https://radiopublic.com/nudging-pixels-6pwlyD</a>
Stitcher	<a href="https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/anchor-podcasts/nudging-pixels">https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/anchor-podcasts/nudging-pixels</a>

Fig. 9 Nudging Pixels settings for automatic publishing to listening platforms by Anchor.fm

2019) (see fig. 10). iTunes provides a slightly more detailed view of your listening, but that is data only from listeners on iTunes. It gives us the average percentage of each episode listened to as shown in fig. 11.

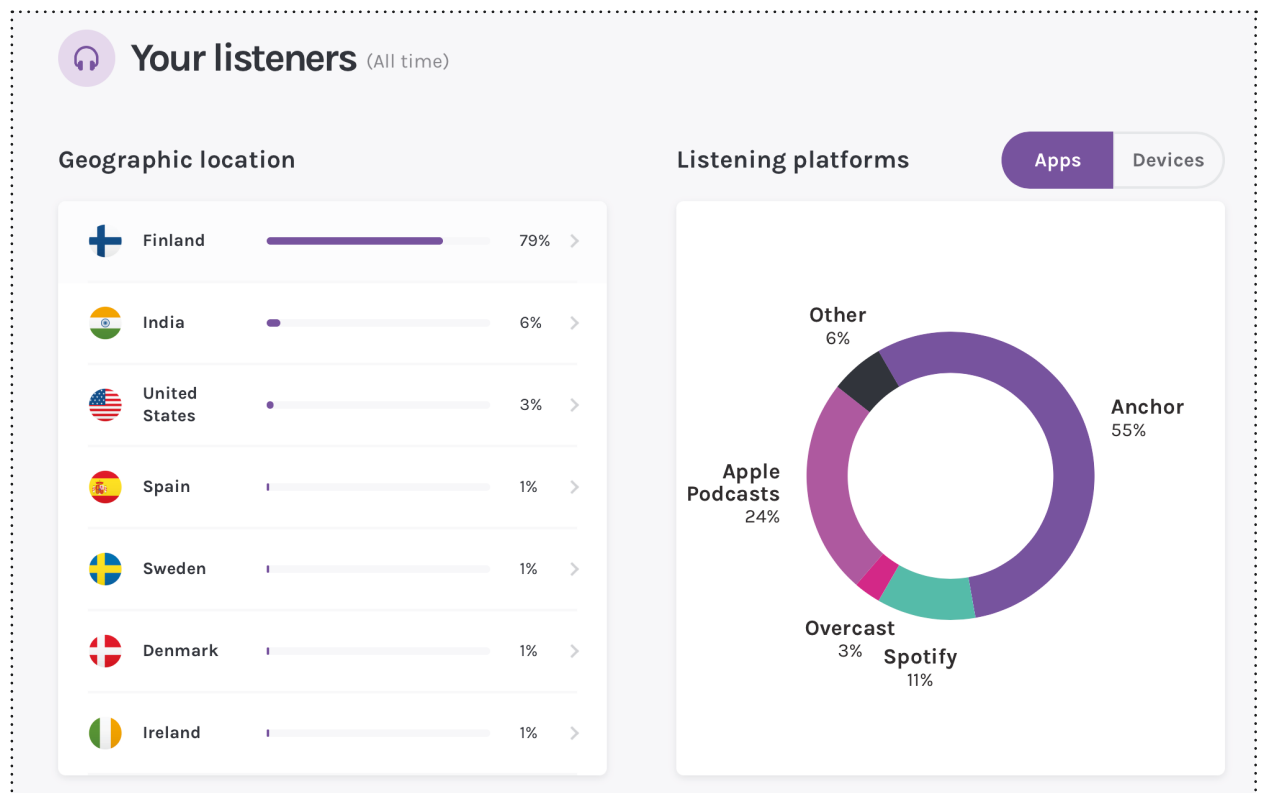


Fig. 10 Anchor's listener analytics for Nudging Pixels categorised by location, application and device in April 2019

Episodes (3)			Search		All Episode Types		
Episode	Name	Released	Duration	Devices	Total Time Listened	Time per Device	Average Consumption
S1, E3	Elias Aalto : Scaling design at Wolt	Mar 9, 2019	39 min	8	2 hr	16 min	41%
S1, E2	Petra Väänänen-Leimu : Insights as a basis for Design	Feb 8, 2019	32 min	10	4 hr	22 min	67%
	Akseli Anttila : How do you design for VR?	Jan 10, 2019	27 min	12	4 hr	18 min	66%

Fig. 11 iTunes per episode listener analytics for Nudging Pixels in April 2019

For podcasts right now, the only data one can now get is listening behaviour. How many listens each episode has had, the platforms, and how long someone listens to your show (Chadha, Alex Avila, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012). No host provides a subscriber count, and one can only guess the statistics

on that. This can be a drawback especially if one is trying to pitch for more resources from company management. In March 2019, Anchor's new analytics tool revealed an estimate of regular listeners (see fig. 12), based on the number of listens within the first 30 days of publishing a new episode. This data is in no way 100 per cent accurate but provides an understanding of our podcast's following.

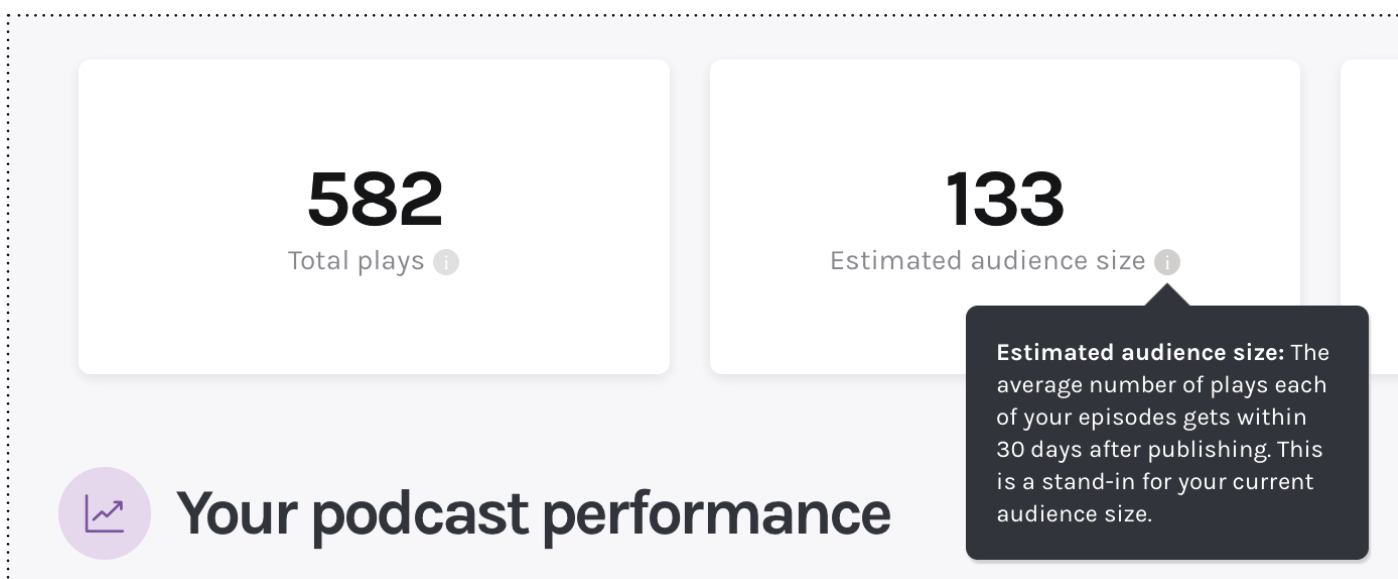


Fig. 12 Anchor's analytics on the estimated audience size of *Nudging Pixels* in April 2019

### 4.3.2 Promoting Nudging Pixels

We had identified a few platforms where we would be promoting *Nudging Pixels*. This was an essential step since so many podcasts exist. We could not rely on listeners chancing upon our show. We tapped into Houston Inc's following on social media channels as one way of getting our first listeners. We also used our personal networks to spread the word, through our LinkedIn and personal twitter accounts. We received a few listeners with the described methods, but the real spike came when we promoted the show on a local Interaction Design group on Facebook (see fig. 13). Within one day the listenership for the first episode jumped from 60 to 77 (see fig. 14). Since they were one of our primary target audiences, that was a good boost.

We noticed that Finland needs its first digital design podcast. Especially in English. So me and my fellow designer Maya Pillai created one! Listen to Nudging Pixels here <https://lnkd.in/gFaUUzw> and subscribe on your favourite podcast platform.

First episode on designing for virtual reality with Akseli Anttila, Principal UX Designer at Varjo.



**NEW DESIGN PODCAST HOSTED BY MAYA & ELINA, DESIGNERS AT HOUSTON INC.**  
1st EPISODE OUT NOW WITH AKSELI ANTILA FROM VARJO.

Fig. 13 Promotional post on IxDA Helsinki's Facebook group

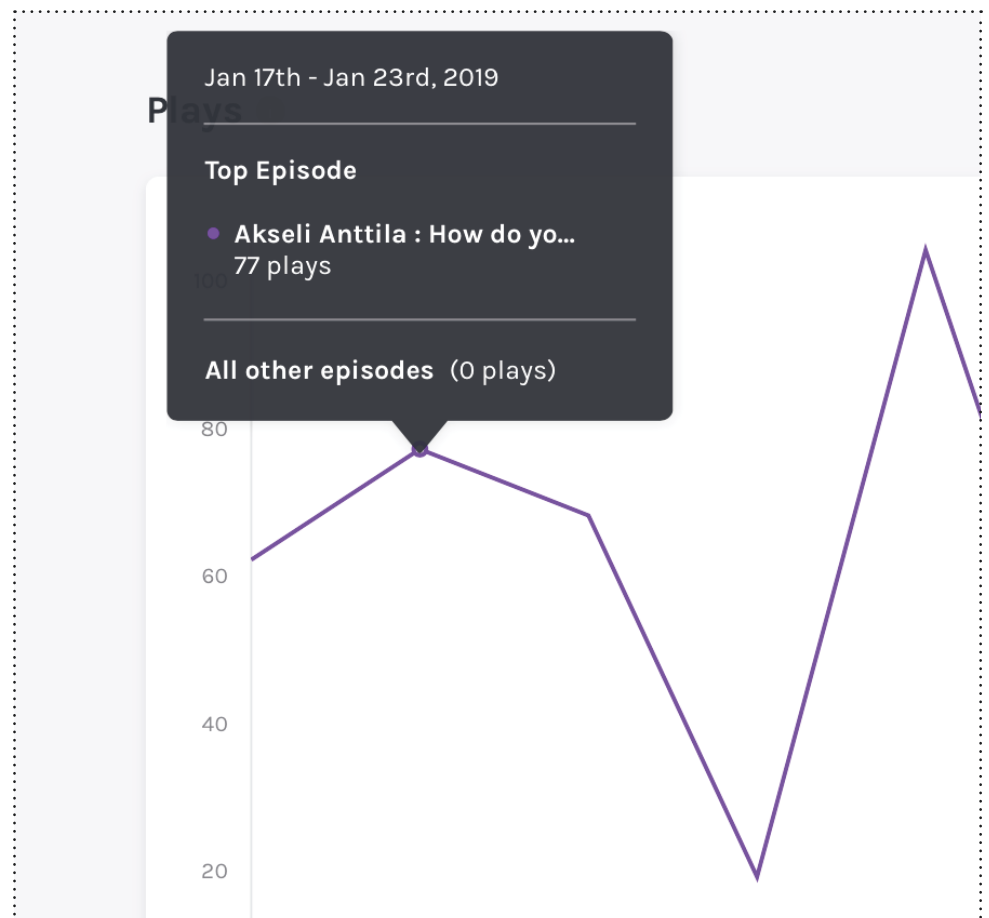


Fig. 14 Increase in episode listens after Facebook post. Anchor listener analytics.



## Chapter 5

# Results:

Nudging Pixels as knowledge sharing, content marketing and for building familiarity

Skains says that in practice related research, it is not required to answer to any gaps in academic work or cultural contexts, one can attempt to understand the creative artefact itself (Skains, 2018). Also, as this thesis follows practice-based research, the aim was to explore the role of podcasts, as a vehicle of knowledge dissemination, to help a company build its network and brand and provide some learnings based on this exploration.

As detailed in chapter 2, podcasts can be examined through a few different lenses. Moreover, in an attempt to clarify the ‘role’ of podcasts, the results in this section are presented through the lenses of knowledge sharing, content marketing and building familiarity. These lenses help provide a more distinct picture of what *Nudging Pixels* could do for Houston Inc.’s brand and reach in the design community in Finland.

As mentioned in chapter 3, understanding how the podcast is received and my reflection on its efficacy, form the basis for the results of this thesis. By observing the listener metrics, we can achieve a better understanding of what episode lengths audiences prefer, what topics resonated with them more and whether we were providing enough relatable content to the audience. The overall reception of the show was positive. Listener’s left positive comments on the promotional posts for *Nudging Pixels* on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and episode guests shared links to the show on their social networking platforms (see fig. 15).

This chapter contains the results and my learnings from this exploration that other practitioners might also find valuable.

## 5.1 Knowledge sharing

The method used to understand the effectiveness of *Nudging Pixels* as a form of knowledge sharing is conversations with known listeners. Since no survey was conducted, only these conversations provide a qualitative and detailed understanding of the individual listener’s reaction.




6. **KUUDES – Nordic Insight, Strategy & Design Agency** @kuudes... · Feb 8 ✓

Insight-driven #design makes sure that there is a real market for your product – and you don't end up designing just for fellow designers.

Kuudes Insight Specialist @pvaananen was interviewed by the podcast @NudgingPixels. Listen up! 🎧

#consumerinsight



**Petra Väänänen-Leimu : Insights as a basis for Design by Nudging Pix...**

As more companies start adopting a user-centric approach to their business, the need for customer insights increases. But knowing who your... [anchor.fm](https://anchor.fm)

🗨️ ↺️ ❤️ 6 ✉️

 **Future is Present Tense.**

STUDIO

THINKING

WORK

CULTURE

PRESS

WEEKNOTES



## What has been happening this week?

**Sonja** has been busy with DesignOps stuff. Also, you can catch up with Sonja next month at *Nudging Pixels* podcast. Tune in!

Fig. 15 New episode alerts shared by the companies guests work at

For the podcast to be useful as knowledge sharing, it would have to provide new and relatable content to the audience, as elaborated on in section 2.2. In a conversation with one listener, they mentioned that episode three, Scaling design at Wolt, was an episode they related to. On further probing, it appeared that this was the case because the listener was currently working at an early stage technology startup. Episode three discusses the main ups and downs and the strategies that the design leads at Wolt, a food delivery application, applied to create the product. According to the listener, hearing about similar challenges put their mind at ease, and the episode provided them with insights that would be relevant to their workplace. Based on the conversation, it seems that the listener received content they could relate to from that episode.

In another conversation with a listener about episode one, How to design for VR, they discussed how they are sceptical about the application of Virtual Reality in the present. In the episode, the guest elaborated on the various industries that could use high-quality virtual reality headsets. The listener said they considered the examples mentioned and realised that they had never looked at the medium from the lens of training, which is what is discussed in the episode.

However, while speaking with another listener about episode two, Using insights as a basis for design, they remarked how they did not listen to the whole episode. On further investigation, it was found that this was because the listener felt the episode was discussing a theme that they felt did not apply directly to their field of work. It appears they were unable to relate with the subject and hence lost interest.

In conclusion, not all episodes were able to meet the measure of new and relatable. It would seem that while one episode gave a listener a new perspective on a subject, another gave its listener content they could relate with whereas a third listener felt that another episode had no interesting content to offer to them. A clearer understanding of what could be relatable content for the target audience could help avoid such pitfalls in the future.

## 5.2 Content marketing

To measure the effectiveness of *Nudging Pixels* as a form of content marketing, it is essential to revisit the definition mentioned in section 2.2, "Content marketing is an approach by which companies seek to author and/or share contextually relevant content to create or reinforce their brand messaging. When done effectively, content marketing is not done in direct support of a sales process, but rather by positioning a company or individual within a space". This definition can be divided into two parts, one, "authoring contextually relevant content" and two, using that content to "position the company within a space" ('What is Content Marketing?', 2019). The results for the first part of this definition concerning *Nudging Pixels* are addressed in the previous section, 5.1. In this section, I will address the results of the second half of this definition.

To understand how the position of Houston Inc. changed within the space, it would have been appropriate to identify some key performance indexes (KPIs) during the conceptualisation of *Nudging Pixels*. The space, in this case, is the design industry in Finland. Due to the demanding nature of the production, as part of this exploration, we could not incorporate methods of measuring the podcast's reach beyond the data provided by the hosting platform, Anchor. It appeared that we only had resources sufficient enough to publish one episode a month successfully. The additional time required to validate its efficacy and to measure it against the goals ended up being out of the scope.

The motivation behind *Nudging Pixels* was firstly about the need to experiment with the medium and secondly to see how it would fit into Houston Inc.'s marketing goals. It may have proved useful to add a section for *Nudging Pixels* in Houston Inc.'s website before the launch of the first episode, to determine whether the podcast was encouraging listeners to explore the Houston Inc. website, which could work as a means for measuring Houston Inc.'s reach in 'the space' based on website clicks.

To conclude, more concise methods of measurement, like identifying KPIs, that can be evaluated with a before and after state, could be applied to better measure the role of *Nudging Pixels* as a form of content marketing.

## 5.3 Building familiarity

Section 2.3, Building bridges over microphones, covers the aspects that bring a podcast and its hosts closer to the audience. Since no survey was conducted and Anchor, the podcast hosting platform, does not provide audience contact data, measuring this can prove to be difficult. However, familiarity can also be measured with an already known audience in terms of their interest in the podcast and need for associating with it.

After the launch of *Nudging Pixels*, designers and CEOs of technology companies based in Helsinki, reached out to us with requests to be featured on the podcast. The design lead of an existing client and the CEOs of two different product development consultancies that could be potential partners to Houston Inc. made requests to collaborate on the podcast. These requests can be ruled as signs that the audience of *Nudging Pixels* wanted to be associated more with the show. It would appear that they felt the show would provide them with the opportunity to share their knowledge with *Nudging Pixels*' target audience. As a result, it can be concluded that further interactions with these guests could widen Houston Inc.'s network by bringing them closer to us.

After listening to episode one, a colleague at Houston Inc. felt that the episode centred too much around the guest and they would have preferred to hear the host's, that is Elina and my voices a bit more. In response to that feedback, we introduced more extended introductions by us in the following episodes. So, it would appear that the same listener, after listening to

episode three, conveyed that they felt they were able to hear our point of view better in the third episode. It seems that by just adding more conversation between the hosts, and also including more of our comments in the interview itself, the problem may have been resolved. As outlined in section 2.3, letting the audience feel like they are getting to know the host, is one measure of building familiarity.



## Chapter 6

# **Limitations and further development**

## 6.1 Limitations of the research

It can be concluded from the Results chapter, that the ‘role’ of podcasts could not be understood entirely through all three lenses. The main limitation of this exploration was a lack of resources. As we learnt during the making of *Nudging Pixels*, podcast production is a time-consuming activity (See table 3). Especially when this is additional time spent on the production outside of our consulting work and that the production quality and content have high benchmarks as ours did. With only two people taking care of the guest management, interviews, audio editing and publishing, it was hard to keep up. All of these things had to be done alongside our client work. We have recognised that this may not be the most sustainable way to go forward with the second season. We would need additional help in at least the audio editing and production, or we would need to cut down on the frequency of the show. Since we would prefer to continue to publish one episode per month, I have outlined potential future paths for *Nudging Pixels* in the next section.

### Time spent per episode per month

<b>Pre-production</b>	Guest contacting	1 day
	Research	2 days
<b>Production</b>	Recording	0.5 days
	Editing	3 days
<b>Post-production</b>	Social-media promotion	0.5 days

\*1 day = 7.5 hours per person

Table 4



## 6.2 The future of Nudging Pixels

I look at the future of *Nudging Pixels*, in three parts. One is the content of the show for Season two, second is the team, and work allocation for more efficient production and third is regarding the marketing of the show and setting more realistic KPIs and ways to measure them.

Firstly, for the second season of *Nudging Pixels*, we have discussed modifying the format of the show. Much like writing this thesis, a hybrid format with multiple interviews, allows us, the hosts, a voice to analyse and discuss the information that has been given to us. Which could be a way of making the podcast have a voice that resembles ours more.

This was feedback that we constantly kept receiving during the first season. Friends and listeners felt like they wanted to hear more from us. It was a clear need and based on the information presented in section 2.3, Building bridges over microphones, almost a requirement for our listeners to build better connections with us. We played a slightly passive role in the show, that of mostly asking questions and providing some commentary. We did try to incorporate this feedback already from season one, episode three onwards, by including a more conversational introduction to the episode and making sure we included more comments from us during the interview.

It also might be worth our time to make use of listener surveys to get an understanding of preferred episode length and content. The episodes could still feature interviews from designers and those working in technology, but the focus of each episode would be a central theme. It is an approach we have taken for episode five "Designing for Children", and one that we feel conveys our knowledge and skills better. The episode is yet to be published, so audience feedback and validation for it is still pending.

Secondly, It might be helpful to collaborate with existing podcast production companies like Jaksomedia (mentioned

in section 2.2.2), that provide audio and sound editing services. Since a lot of our time was spent in the editing room, outsourcing that task would give us more time to work on the content and themes of the show. Also, production companies would have higher skills that would provide us with more flexibility in how the episodes are structured and the use of sound effects which can help us better achieve the quality standards set by our benchmarked podcasts. Of course, this would come at additional costs, and the budget of the production would go much higher. This is a way forward that we are yet to discuss with the decision makers at Houston Inc.

Thirdly, to gauge the reach of *Nudging Pixels* and understand its marketing value, we would need to outline our goals better and set up key performance indexes. Based on these, we would have to routinely check the performance to get a more statistical understanding of the reach. Data like this can help upper management make better-informed decisions regarding resource allocation and budget.

## Chapter 7

# Conclusion

The process of producing *Nudging Pixels* for Houston Inc. has and continues to be something I enjoy. Managing almost every aspect of the production in partnership with Elina Korpela has taught me a lot about the different aspects of podcast production and shown me the parts I enjoy the most.

My relationship with podcasts has solidified even more through this process. I find myself not only listening to more shows but also examining and noticing the small details in production and storytelling. This has given me another layer to enjoy the medium with. The research required by me during the production of this thesis has helped me understand the different aspects of the medium.

*Nudging Pixels* is a project that will continue even after the completion of this thesis and I am glad I get to be a part of it. I am looking forward to learning about newer aspects of podcast production, the experiences that will come with it, the new people I will get to meet and exploring further the role *Nudging Pixels* plays in expanding Houston Inc.'s network and reputation.





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## Appendix

1. Link to Nudging Pixels: <https://anchor.fm/nudgingpixels>

The first four episodes of season one are also in a portable flash drive accompanying this document

2. Podcasts mentioned in this text

Design Matter with Debbie Millman <https://www.designmattersmedia.com/designmatters>

WTF with Marc Maron <http://www.wtfpod.com/>

Serial <https://serialpodcast.org/>

S-Town <https://stownpodcast.org/>

Welcome to Night Vale <http://www.welcometonightvale.com/>

Blackout <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/blackout/id1447513097?mt=2>

99% invisible <https://99percentinvisible.org/>

Note to Self <https://www.wnycstudios.org/shows/notetoself>

Code Switch <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/?t=1554825037897>

Function with Anil Dash <https://glitch.com/culture/function/>

3. Finnish podcasts mentioned in this text

Palmun Alla <https://www.palmunalla.fi/>

Haastajat <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/haastajat/id1384299592?mt=2>

Futureproof <https://www.workdaydesigners.com/futureproofpodcast>

Valoisa Tulevaisuus <https://itunes.apple.com/fi/podcast/valoisa-tulevaisuus/id1400465022?mt=2>

Fjord Fika <https://podcast.fjordnet.com/fika/>

Vaiheessa <https://nordkapp.fi/work/vaiheessa/>

4. Audio editing software mentioned in this text

Audacity <https://www.audacityteam.org/>

Garageband <https://www.apple.com/lae/mac/garageband/>

Adobe Audition <https://www.adobe.com/products/audition.html>

5. Podcast content management platforms

Podbean <https://www.podbean.com/>

Libsyn <https://www.libsyn.com/>

Soundcloud <https://soundcloud.com/>

Anchor.fm <https://anchor.fm/>

6. NPR's project blueprint <https://training.npr.org/audio/a-blueprint-for-planning-storytelling-projects/>

7. Sample e-mail

*Dear [guest]*

*[Include reference or person through whom you received contact information]*

*We are calling it \*Nudging Pixels\*. The podcast explores the work of Finnish designers in the world of technology. We interview 1 or 2 guests per episode and the theme revolves around the guest's area of expertise/interest.*

*[Include why you're contacting this particular guest]*

*Thanks,  
Maya/Elina  
Nudging Pixels from Houston Inc.*

## 8. Guest details and episode theme google form

### Nudging Pixels - Guest Insights

By answering these questions we get to know you and your background better and it helps us form the theme of the episode and draft a better script to guide our conversation.

**\*Required**

1. Let's start with the basics. What is your full name? \*

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2. Where do you work? \*

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3. What is your professional title? \*

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4. If you have a pre-written bio that you would like us to introduce you with, please mention it here.

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5. If not, could you tell us a bit about your background? What do you do now? What has brought you there?

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6. What is your expertise/ key area of interest (in design)?

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7. Any other wishes or information you'd like us to be aware of?

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8. Please upload a picture of yourself that we can use as part of the album art and other social media promotion.

Files submitted:

